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homemakers' chat
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Tuesday, July 1, 1941

QUESTION BOX

Care of household electric motors
Closet in garage?
Fireproof cover for ironing-board

Answers from engineers and chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

Practical questions around the house fill the mailbag this week. Here's a letter from a farm housewife asking about care of electric motors. And here's one about building a closet in a garage. Another letter asks how to fireproof the cover of an ironing board.

Let's begin with the letter about electric motors. It says: "A power-line has just come in reach of our farm and I am thinking of having the house wired for electricity. But I wonder if I should know a lot about the care of a motor to use an electric washing-machine or vacuum cleaner?"

Engineers of the Department of Agriculture say well-made electric motors on household equipment will run for years with no trouble if you remember just 4 simple rules: One, keep the insulating material around the motor clean, dry and free from grit and other substances that might damage them. In most household electric equipment the motor is enclosed to protect it from dust, and the user from accidents. The motor on a washing machine is splash-proof just like the motors used around barns and milk-houses.

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Two--store your new electric equipment in a dry, well-ventilated room or closet. Motors that are idle for long stretches are more likely to be damaged by moisture in the air than those in use. It helps if you run them frequently. The heat and fanning action of a running motor will help keep the insulation dry.

Three--oil the motor from time to time, but not too much. Most equipment

comes with printed directions from the manufacturer that tell you just how to oil. Be sure you use the right kind of oil. Light sewing-machine oil is best for small motors like the one on a vacuum cleaner.

Four, have your electric household equipment inspected occasionally by a competent electrician. Sometimes damage does not show up at once in the machine's performance, but gives trouble later.

Then, there is one very important point to check on before you buy electric equipment. See whether the voltage given on the name-plate is not more than 5 percent under or over the voltage of the current delivered to your house. A motor wears out before its time if it must operate on the wrong voltage.

Though it's a good idea to have an occasional check-up by an experienced electrician, the handy-man around the house can locate and adjust many small troubles. A new Government bulletin will help. The bulletin is called "Electric Motors for the Farm." It tells about minor troubles and how to remedy them easily. You can get a copy of "Electric Motors for the Farm" by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. If you want to ask for it by number, ask for Farmers' Bulletin No. 1858. The bulletin is free as long as the free supply lasts.

Now from motors let's turn to closets. Here's a letter from a housewife who is building a double garage. She writes that: "The house has very few and very small closets. I thought I might have a closet in the garage for extra furniture.

Architects and home economists of the Department of Agriculture have recently been working on well-planned closets. They say the first thing to do is to measure the furniture you want to store and estimate the amount of floor-space it will need. Then you will know how large a closet to plan.

Next, plan where to build the closet. You might have it at the back of the garage. In that case, you could build the garage longer than necessary for the car. Allow 20 feet for the car. Then add enough space for the closet. Or, if the garage is to be attached to the house, the closet might be a wing between the garage and the house. You could enter the closet from the inside or outside of the garage. If the entrance is inside the garage, be sure the door is placed so you can open it without having to move the car. And be sure to plan a door at least 2 feet 8 inches wide. Otherwise the door may be too small to get your furniture through.

In such a closet you will probably want to plan shelf-space and hanging-space for articles that you will use out of doors during the summer. This would be a convenient place to keep garden tools, lawn mower, croquet sets, fishing tackle, oars, paddles and so on.

Some ideas for storing such articles you can find in the closet bulletin. If you want the new bulletin on closets, write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and ask for Farmers' Bulletin No. 1865 called "Closets and Storage Spaces."

Last question: "I've heard that you can make an ironing-board cover fireproof. Will you tell me how?"

Dip the cloth in a bowlful of 2 quarts of hot water with 7 ounces of borax and 3 ounces of boric acid dissolved in it. Make a paste of the 3 ounces of powdered boric acid and a little hot water. Add this paste and the 7 ounces of borax to the rest of the hot water. Stir until clear. Dip the ironing board cover in, wring it out, dry it. This fireproofing does not make the fabric 100 percent fireproof but it does prevent flames from spreading.

That's all the questions and answers for today.

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